

### Veterinary homeopathy — A rebuttal

Dear Sir:

We are concerned that readers may have a false notion of the potential efficacy of homeopathic treatment after reading the article by Dr. Vockeroth (Can Vet J 1999; 40: 592–594).

Samuel Hahnemann was a German physician who became “lost in occultism” prior to the “discovery” of homeopathy in the late 1700s (1). Hahnemann’s “work” is merely a collection of the “symptoms” claimed to have occurred after ingestion of highly diluted substances. Under scientific testing, subjects have repeatedly been unable to distinguish between homeopathic preparations and water.

In addition to dubious remedies, Hahnemann also developed some creative approaches to disease pathogenesis, suggesting that there were only a few causes of acute and chronic illnesses, called “miasms.” The first, “psora” (itch), refers to a general susceptibility to disease and was considered the source of all chronic diseases. Two other miasms are syphilis and sycosis (gonorrhea). These 3 conditions were purported to cause at least 80 per cent of all chronic diseases. Hahnemann rejected any external causes of disease, stating, “The causes of our maladies cannot be material, since the least foreign material substance, however mild it may appear to us, if introduced into our blood-vessels, is promptly ejected by the vital force, as though it were a poison....no disease, in a word, is caused by any material substance, but that every one is only and always a peculiar, virtual, dynamic derangement of the health” (2).

Besides its nonsensical foundations, there appear to be 2 primary reasons for the rejection of homeopathy by the science-based medical community. First, there is no plausible mechanism by which homeopathic dilutions — substances so diluted that not a molecule of the original substance is likely to exist — can act (other than on the minds of their users). While advocates of homeopathy are forever inventing ad hoc “physics theories” to explain effects they are unable to demonstrate, the physical sciences have not given any reason to believe that a true mechanism of action will be forthcoming.

Second, there is a huge body of scientific work that shows that homeopathic preparations are ineffective. There is no single condition in which homeopathic preparations have been shown to have an effect beyond placebo. Indeed, in 11 reviews or meta-analyses that have been conducted since 1986, in human and veterinary

medicine, no therapeutic effect of high dilution homeopathic remedies has been found (3–5).

While individual studies may purport to show an effect of the remedies, these studies are generally conducted under less than ideal conditions. Indeed, one might expect that the record of studies comparing homeopathic remedies with placebos would be quite confusing. Such studies merely compare one placebo treatment with another; random results would be expected under such conditions. Recent reviews have confirmed that under the best experimental models, the purported effects of homeopathic preparations disappear (6).

“The greatest obstacle” to employing homeopathy in veterinary practice is not any preconceived notion, nor is it a failure to understand the arcane principles of Hahnemann. Rather, it is a 200-year record of failure of homeopathic remedies to successfully treat any non-self-limiting condition. Veterinarians interested in educating themselves about this historical therapeutic oddity might review a detailed paper on the subject at <http://www.phys.hawaii.edu/vjs/www/med/homeop.html>.

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### References

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2. Hahnemann S. Organon of Medicine. 6th ed. Calcutta: M. Bhattacharyya, 1960.
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5. Linde K, Clausius N, Ramirez G, et al. Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? A meta-analysis of placebo-controlled trials. Lancet 1997;350:834–843.
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### Veterinary homeopathy — A rebuttal — A reply

Dear Sir:

I wish to respond to the letter from Drs. Ramey, Imrey, and Bowles regarding veterinary homeopathy.

I always find it interesting how ideas can be turned around in a debate, depending on the views and loquacity of the debaters. Drs. Ramey, Imrey, and Bowles seem to

be very good at picking out statements from various publications, taking them completely out of context, and then using present scientific theory to refute them. Particularly, I was amused at how they attempt to dismiss decades of careful, repeatable, and painstakingly recorded data

as “merely a collection of ‘symptoms’.” As well, their comments on miasms show a complete lack of understanding of the fundamentals of homeopathy, and, as often happens with human nature, when something is different and difficult to understand, it is rejected and even ridiculed.

Of course, it is difficult to make homeopathy fit into our typical scientific models and studies, since it is derived from a completely different model — as are traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine. I would be curious to hear the correspondents’ views on these 2 established medical traditions.

It is exceedingly easy to become very tied to and defensive of an idea when one has been brought up with and schooled in it all of one’s life, but it can also make one blind to the short-comings of that idea or model. Perhaps the correspondents should turn their analytical views to looking at the present-day scientific model. They may discover how often a “reputable” experiment turns out very differently, depending on who are performing the experiment and what results they are looking for. Moreover, science itself is obviously changing very rapidly. Thirty years ago, acupuncture was dismissed out of hand by scientists, because there were no plausible scientific mechanisms of action. Since that time, science has developed much more sensitive means of measuring changes in the body, and it has

recently been discovered that acupuncture does create minute but measurable physiologic effects — so, suddenly, this 4000-year-old treatment modality does work, after all!

The correspondents’ claim that homeopathy is totally ineffective, makes me chuckle. Certainly, homeopathy will not cure every case, but a large number of my clients would be happy to tell you that the “homeopathic placebos” that they gave their pets cured them of some very chronic ailments — and if these animals are displaying a placebo effect, then I’m happy to accept it, and allow these pets continued good health in their delusions.

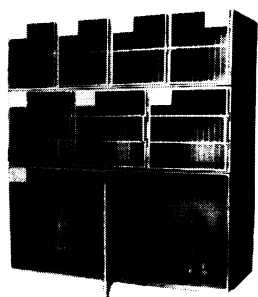
I understand that the correspondents are concerned that people who seek out homeopathy may simply be looking for a miracle cure and that their pets may not be properly cared for because of that. I would like to reemphasize that, in the hands of properly trained veterinarians, veterinary homeopathy can and should be viewed as another useful tool to help us to our goal of providing the best in care for our animal patients.

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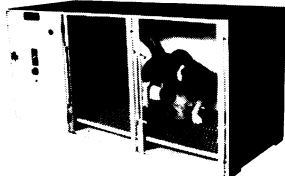
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